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CLEOPATRA

By Georg Ebers

Volume 3.

CHAPTER VI.

The men sent by Archibius to obtain news had brought back no definite information; but a short time before, a royal runner had handed him a tablet from Iras, requesting him to visit her the next day. Disquieting, but fortunately as yet unverified tidings had arrived. The Regent was doing everything in his power to ascertain the truth; but he (Archibius) was aware of the distrust of the government, and everything connected with it, felt by the sailors and all the seafaring folk at the harbour. An independent person like himself could often learn more than the chief of the harbour police, with all his ships and men.

The little tablet was accompanied by a second, which, in the Regent's name, authorized the bearer to have the harbour chains raised anywhere, to go out into the open sea and return without interference.

The messenger, the overseer of Archibius's galley slaves, was an experienced man. He undertook to have the "Epicurus"—a swift vessel, which Cleopatra had given to her friend—ready for a voyage to the open sea within two hours. The carriage should be sent for his master, that no time might be lost.

When Archibius had returned to the ladies and asked whether it would be an abuse of their hospitality, if—it was now nearly midnight—he should still delay his departure for a time, they expressed sincere pleasure, and begged him to continue his narrative.

"I must hasten," he hurriedly began, after eating the lunch which Berenike had ordered while he was talking with the messenger, "but the events of the next few years are hardly worth mentioning. Besides, my time was wholly occupied by my studies in the museum.

"As for Cleopatra and Arsinoe, they stood like queens at the head of all the magnificence of the court. The day on which they left our house was the last of their childhood.

"Who would venture to determine whether her father's restoration, or the meeting with Antony, had wrought the great change which took place at that time in Cleopatra?

"Just before she left us, my mother had lamented that she must give her to a father like the flute-player, instead of to a worthy mother; for the best could not help regarding herself happy in the possession of such a daughter. Afterwards her character and conduct were better suited to delight men than to please a mother. The yearning for peace of mind seemed over. Only the noisy festivals, the singing and music, of which there was never any cessation in the palace of the royal virtuoso, seemed to weary her and at such times she appeared at our house and spent several days beneath its roof. Arsinoe never accompanied her; her heart was sometimes won by a golden-haired officer in the ranks of the German horsemen whom Gabinius had left among the garrison of Alexandria, sometimes by a Macedonian noble among the youths who, at that time, performed the service of guarding the palace.

"Cleopatra lived apart from her, and Arsinoe openly showed her hostility from the time that she entreated her to put an end to the scandal caused by her love affairs.

"Cleopatra held aloof from such things.

"Though she had devoted much time to the magic arts of the Egyptians, her clear intellect had rendered her so familiar with the philosophy of the Hellenes that it was a pleasure to hear her converse or argue in the museum—as she often did—with the leaders of the various schools. Her self-confidence had become very strong. Though, while with us, she said that she longed to return to the days of the peaceful Garden of Epicurus, she devoted herself eagerly enough to the events occurring in the world and to statecraft. She was familiar with everything in Rome, the desires and struggles of the contending parties, as well as the characters of the men who were directing affairs, their qualities, views, and aims.

"She followed Antony's career with the interest of love, for she had bestowed on him the first affection of her young heart. She had expected the greatest achievements, but his subsequent course seemed to belie these lofty hopes. A tinge of scorn coloured her remarks concerning him at that time, but here also her heart had its share.

"Pompey, to whom her father owed his restoration to the throne, she considered a lucky man, rather than a great and wise one. Of Julius Caesar, on the contrary, long before she met him, she spoke with ardent enthusiasm, though she knew that he would gladly have made Egypt a Roman province. The greatest deed which she expected from the energetic Julius was that he would abolish the republic, which she hated, and soar upward to tyrannize over the arrogant rulers of the world—only she would fain have seen Antony in his place. How often in those days she used magic art to assure herself of his future! Her father was interested in these things, especially as, through them, and the power of the mighty Isis, he expected to obtain relief from his many and severe sufferings.

"Cleopatra's brothers were still mere boys, completely dependent upon their guardian, Pothinus, to whom the King left the care of the government, and their tutor, Theodotus, a clever but unprincipled rhetorician. These two men and Achillas, the commander of the troops, would gladly have aided Dionysus, the King's oldest male heir, to obtain the control of the state, in order afterwards to rule him, but the flute-player baffled their plans. You know that in his last will he made Cleopatra, his favourite child, his successor, but her brother Dionysus was to share the throne as her husband. This caused much scandal in Rome, though it was an old custom of the house of Ptolemy, and suited the Egyptians.

"The flute-player died. Cleopatra became Queen, and at the same time the wife of a husband ten years old, for whom she did not even possess the natural gift of sisterly tenderness. But with the obstinate child who had been told by his counsellors that the right to rule should be his alone, she also married the former governors of the country.

"Then began a period of sore suffering. Her life was a perpetual battle against notorious intrigues, the worst of which owed their origin to her sister. Arsinoe had surrounded herself with a court of her own, managed by the eunuch Ganymedes, an experienced commander, and at the same time a shrewd adviser, wholly devoted to her interest. He understood how to bring her into close relations with Pothinus and other rulers of the state, and thus at last united all who possessed any power in the royal palace in an endeavour to thrust Cleopatra from the throne. Pothinus, Theodotus, and Achillas hated

her because she saw their failings and made them feel the superiority of her intellect. Their combined efforts might have succeeded in overthrowing her before, had not the Alexandrians, headed by the Ephebi, over whom I still had some influence, stood by her so steadfastly. Whoever could still be classed as a youth glowed with enthusiasm for her, and most of the Macedonian nobles in the body-guard would have gone to death for her sake, though she had forced them to gaze hopelessly up to her as if she were some unapproachable goddess.

"When her father died she was seventeen, but she knew how to resist oppressors and foes as if she were a man. My sister, Charmian, whom she had appointed to a place in her service, loyally aided her. At that time she was a beautiful and lovable girl, but the spell exerted by the Queen fettered her like chains and bonds. She voluntarily resigned the love of a noble man—he afterwards became your husband, Berenike—in order not to leave her royal friend at a time when she so urgently needed her. Since then my sister has shut her heart against love. It belonged to Cleopatra. She lives, thinks, cares for her alone. She is fond of you, Barine, because your father was so dear to her. Iras, whose name is so often associated with hers, is the daughter of my oldest sister, who was already married when the King entrusted the princesses to our father's care. She is thirteen years younger than Cleopatra, but her mistress holds the first place in her heart also. Her father, the wealthy Krates, made every effort to keep her from entering the service of the Queen, but in vain. A single conversation with this marvellous woman had bound her forever.

"But I must be brief. You have doubtless heard how completely Cleopatra bewitched Pompey's son during his visit to Alexandria. She had not been so gracious to any man since her meeting with Antony, and it was not from affection, but to maintain the independence of her beloved native land. At that time the father of Gnejus was the man who possessed the most power, and statecraft commanded her to win him through his son. The young Roman also took his leave 'full of her,' as the Egyptians say. This pleased her, but the visit greatly aided her foes. There was no slander which was not disseminated against her. The commanders of the body-guard, whom she had always treated as a haughty Queen, had seen her associate with Pompey's son in the theatre as if he were a friend of equal rank; and on many other occasions the Alexandrians saw her repay his courtesies in the same coin. But in those days hatred of Rome surged high. The regents, leagued with Arsinoe, spread the rumour that Cleopatra would deliver Egypt up to Pompey, if the senate would secure to her the sole sovereignty of the new province, and leave her free to rid herself of her royal brother and husband.

"She was compelled to fly, and went first to the Syrian frontier, to gain friends for her cause among the Asiatic princes. My brother Straton—you remember the noble youth who won the prize for wrestling at Olympia, Berenike—and I were commissioned to carry the treasure to her. We doubtless exposed ourselves to great peril, but we did so gladly, and left Alexandria with a few camels, an ox-cart, and some trusted slaves. We were to go to Gaza, where Cleopatra was already beginning to collect an army, and had disguised ourselves as Nabataean merchants. The languages which I had learned, in order not to be distanced by Cleopatra, were now of great service.

"Those were stirring times. The names of Caesar and Pompey were in every mouth. After the defeat at Dyrrachium the cause of Julius seemed lost, but the Pharsalian battle again placed him uppermost, unless the East rose in behalf of Pompey. Both seemed to be favourites of Fortune. The question now was to which the goddess would prove most faithful.

"My sister Charmian was with the Queen, but through one of Arsinoe's maids, who was devoted to her, we had learned from the palace that Pompey's fate was decided. He had come a fugitive from the defeat of Pharsalus, and begged the King of Egypt—that is, the men who were acting in his name—for a hospitable reception. Pothinus and his associates had rarely confronted a greater embarrassment. The troops and ships of the victorious Caesar were close at hand; many of Gabinius' men were serving in the Egyptian army. To receive the vanquished Pompey kindly was to make the victorious Caesar a foe. I was to witness the terrible solution of this dilemma. The infamous words of Theodotus, 'Dead dogs no longer bite,' had turned the scale.

"My brother and I reached Mount Casius with our precious freight, and pitched our tents to await a messenger, when a large body of armed men approached from the city. At first we feared that we were pursued; but a spy reported that the King himself was among the soldiery, and at the same time a large Roman galley drew near the coast. It must be Pompey's. So they had changed their views, and the King was coming in person to receive their guest. The troops encamped on the flat shore on which stood the Temple of the Casian Amon.

"The September sun shone brightly, and was reflected from the weapons. From the high bank of the dry bed of the river, where we had pitched our tent, we saw something scarlet move to and fro. It was the King's mantle. The waves, stirred by the autumn breeze, rippled lightly, blue as cornflowers, over the yellow sand of the dunes; but the King stood still, shading his eyes with his hand as he gazed at the

galley. Meanwhile, Achilles, the commander of the troops, and Septimius, the tribune, who belonged to the Roman garrison in Alexandria, and who, I knew, had served under Pompey and owed him many favours, had entered a boat and put off to the vessel, which could not come nearer the land on account of the shallow water.

"The conference now began, and Achilles's offer of hospitality must have been very warm and well calculated to inspire confidence, for a tall lady—it was Cornelia, the wife of the Emperor—waved her hand to him in token of gratitude."

Here the speaker paused, drew a long breath, and, pressing his hand to his brow, continued "What follows—alas, that it was my fate to witness the dreadful scene! How often a garbled account has been given, and yet the whole was so terribly simple!

"Fortune makes her favourites confiding. Pompey was also. Though more than fifty years old—he lacked two years of sixty—he sprang into the boat quickly enough, with merely a little assistance from a freedman. A sailor—he was a negro—shoved the skiff off from the side of the huge ship as violently as if the pole he used for the purpose was a spear, and the galley his foe. The boat, urged by his companions' oars, had already moved forward, and he stumbled, the brown cap falling from his woolly head in the act.

"It seems as if I could still see him. Ere I clearly realized that this was an evil omen, the boat stopped.

"The water was shallow. I saw Achilles point to the shore. It could be reached by a single bound. Pompey looked towards the King. The freedman put his hand under his arm to help him rise. Septimius also stood up. I thought he intended to assist him. But no! What did this mean? Something flashed by the Emperor's silver-grey hair as if a spark had fallen from the sky. Would Pompey defend himself, or why did he raise his hand? It was to draw around him the toga, with which he silently covered his face. The tribune's arm was again raised high into the air, and then—what confusion! Here, there, yonder, hands suddenly appeared aloft, bright flashes darted through the clear air. Achilles, the general, dealt blows with his dagger as if he were skilled in murder. The Emperor's stalwart figure sank forward. The freedman supported him.

"Then shouts arose, here a cry of fury, yonder a wail of grief, and, rising above all, a woman's shriek of anguish. It came from the lips of Cornelia, the murdered man's wife. Shouts of applause from the King's camp followed, then the blast of a trumpet; the Egyptians drew back from the shore. The scarlet cloak again appeared. Septimius, bearing in his hand a bleeding head, went towards it and held the ghastly trophy aloft.

"The royal boy gazed into the dull eyes of the victim, who had guided the destinies of many a battlefield, of Rome, of two quarters of the globe. The sight was probably too terrible for the child upon the throne, for he averted his head. The ship moved away from the land, the Egyptians formed into ranks and marched off. Achilles cleansed his blood-stained hands in the sea-water. The freedman beside him washed his master's headless trunk. The general shrugged his shoulders as the faithful fellow heaped reproaches on him."

Here Archibius paused, drawing a long breath. Then he continued more calmly:

"Achilles did not lead the troops back to Alexandria, but eastward, towards Pelusium, as I learned later.

"My brother and I stood on the rocky edge of the ravine. It was long ere either spoke. A cloud of dust concealed the King and his body-guard, the sails of the galley disappeared. Twilight closed in, and Straton pointed westward towards Alexandria. Then the sun set. Red! red! It seemed as if a torrent of blood was pouring over the city.

"Night followed. A scanty fire was glimmering on the strand. Where had the wood been gathered in this desert? How had it been kindled? A wrecked, mouldering boat had lain close beside the scene of the murder. The freedman and his companions had broken it up and fed the flames with withered boughs, the torn garments of the murdered man, and dry sea-weed. A blaze soon rose, and a body was carefully placed upon the wretched funeral pyre. It was the corpse of the great Pompey. One of the Emperor's veterans aided the faithful servant."

Here Archibius sank back again among the cushions, adding in explanation:

"Cordus, the man's name was Servius Cordus. He fared well later. The Queen provided for him. The others? Fate overtook them all soon enough. Theodotus was condemned by Brutus to a torturing death. Amid his loud shrieks of agony one of Pompey's veterans shouted, 'Dead dogs no longer bite, but they howl when dying!'

"It was worthy of Caesar that he averted his face in horror from the head of his enemy, which Theodotus sent to him. Pothinus, too, vainly awaited the reward of his infamous deed.

"Julius Caesar had cast anchor before Alexandria shortly after the King's return. Not until after his arrival in Egypt did he learn how Pompey had been received there. You know that he remained nine months. How often I have heard it said that Cleopatra understood how to chain him here! This is both true and false. He was obliged to stay half a year; the following three months he did indeed give to the woman whom he loved. Ay, the heart of the man of fifty-four had again opened to a great passion. Like all wounds, those inflicted by the arrows of Eros heal more slowly when youth lies behind the stricken one. It was not only the eyes and the senses which attracted a couple so widely separated by years, but far more the mental characteristics of both. Two winged intellects had met. The genius of one had recognized that of the other. The highest type of manhood had met perfect womanhood. They could not fail to attract each other. I expected it; for Cleopatra had long watched breathlessly the flight of this eagle who soared so far above the others, and she was strong enough to keep at his side.

"We succeeded in joining Cleopatra, and heard that, spite of the hostility of our citizens, Caesar had occupied the palace of the Ptolemies and was engaged in restoring order.

"We knew in what way Pothinus, Achillas, and Arsinoe would seek to influence him. Cleopatra had good reason to fear that her foes might deliver Egypt unconditionally to Rome, if Caesar should leave the reins of government in their hands and shut her out. She had cause to dread this, but she also had the courage to act in person in her own behalf.

"The point now was to bring her into the city, the palace-nay, into direct communication with the dictator. Children tell the tale of the strong man who bore Cleopatra in a sack through the palace portals. It was not a sack which concealed her, but a Syrian carpet. The strong man was my brother Straton. I went first, to secure a free passage.

"Julius Caesar and she saw and found each other. Fate merely drew the conclusion which must result from such premises. Never have I seen Cleopatra happier, more exalted in mind and heart, yet she was menaced on all sides by serious perils. It required all the military genius of Caesar to conquer the fierce hostility which he encountered here. It was this, not the thrall of Cleopatra, I repeat, which first bound him to Egypt. What would have prevented him—as he did later—from taking the object of his love to Rome, had it been possible at that time? But this was not the case. The Alexandrians provided for that.

"He had recognized the flute-player's will, nay, had granted more to the royal house than could have been given to the former. Cleopatra and her brother-husband, Dionysus, were to share the government, and he also bestowed on Arsinoe and her youngest brother the island of Cyprus, which had been wrested from their uncle Ptolemy by the republic. Rome was, of course, to remain the guardian of the brothers and sisters.

"This arrangement was unendurable to Pothinus and the former rulers of the state. Cleopatra as Queen, and Rome—that is Caesar, the dictator, her friend, as guardian—meant their removal from power, their destruction, and they resisted violently.

"The Egyptians and even the Alexandrians supported them. The young King hated nothing more than the yoke of the unloved sister, who was so greatly his superior. Caesar had come with a force by no means equal to theirs, and it might be possible to draw the mighty general into a snare. They fought with all the power at their command, with such passionate eagerness, that the dictator had never been nearer succumbing to peril. But Cleopatra certainly did not paralyze his strength and cautious deliberation. No! He had never been greater; never proved the power of his genius so magnificently. And against what superior power, what hatred he contended! I myself saw the young King, when he heard that Cleopatra had succeeded in entering the palace and meeting Caesar, rush into the street, fairly crazed by rage, tear the diadem from his head, hurl it on the pavement, and shriek to the passers-by that he was betrayed, until Caesar's soldiers forced him back into the palace, and dispersed the mob.

"Arsinoe had received more than she could venture to expect; but she was again most deeply angered. After Caesar's entry into the palace, she had received him as Queen, and hoped everything from his favour. Then her hated sister had come and, as so often happened, she was forgotten for Cleopatra's sake.

"This was too much, and with the eunuch Ganymedes, her confidant, and—as I have already said—an able warrior, she left the palace and joined the dictator's foes.

"There were severe battles on land and sea; in the streets of the city, for the drinkable water excavated by the foe; and against the conflagration which destroyed part of the Bruchium and the

library of the museum. Yet, half dead with thirst, barely escaped from drowning, threatened on all sides by fierce hatred, he stood firm, and remained victor also in the open field, after the young King had placed himself at the head of the Egyptians and collected an army.

"You know that the boy was drowned in the flight.

"In battle and mortal peril, amid blood and the clank of arms, Caesar and Cleopatra spent half a year ere they were permitted to pluck the fruit of their common labour. The dictator now made her Queen of Egypt, and gave her, as co-regent, her youngest brother, a boy not half her own age. To Arsinoe he granted the life she had forfeited, but sent her to Italy.

"Peace followed the victory. Now, it is true, grave duties must have summoned the statesman back to Rome, but he tarried three full months longer.

"Whoever knows the life of the ambitious Julius, and is aware what this delay might have cost him, may well strike his brow with his hand, and ask, 'Is it true and possible that he used this precious time to take a trip with the woman he loved up the Nile, to the island of Isis, which is so dear to the Queen, to the extreme southern frontier of the country?' Yet it was so, and I myself went in the second ship, and not only saw them together, but more than once shared their banquets and their conversation. It was giving and taking, forcing down and elevating, a succession of discords, not unpleasant to hear, because experience taught that they would finally terminate in the most beautiful harmony. It was a festal day for all the senses."

"I imagine the whole Nile journey," interrupted Barine, "to be like the fairy voyage, when the purple silk sails of Cleopatra's galley bore Antony along the Cydnus."

"No, no," replied Archibius, "she first learned from Antony the art of filling this earthly existence with fleeting pleasures. Caesar demanded more. Her intellect offered him the highest enjoyment."

Here he hesitated.

"True, the skill with which, to please Antony, she daily offered him for years fresh charms for every sense, was not a matter of accident."

"And this," cried Barine, "this was undertaken by the woman who had recognized the chief good in peace of mind!"

"Ay," replied Archibius thoughtfully, "yet this was the inevitable result. Pleasure had been the young girl's object in life. Ere passion awoke in her soul, peace of mind was the chief good she knew. When the hour arrived that this proved unattainable, the firmly rooted yearning for happiness still remained the purpose of her existence. My father would have been wiser to take her to the Stoa and impress it upon her that, if life must have a goal, it should be only to live in accordance with the sensibly arranged course of the world, and in harmony with one's own nature. He should have taught her to derive happiness from virtue. He should have stamped goodness upon the soul of the future Queen as the fundamental law of her being. He omitted to do this, because in his secluded life he had succeeded in finding the happiness which the master promises to his disciples. From Athens to Cyrene, from Epicurus to Aristippus, is but a short step, and Cleopatra took it when she forgot that the master was far from recognizing the chief good in the enjoyment of individual pleasure. The happiness of Epicurus was not inferior to that of Zeus, if he had only barley bread and water to appease his hunger and thirst.

"Yet she still considered herself a follower of Epicurus, and later, when Antony had gone to the Parthian war, and she was a long time alone, she once more began to strive for freedom from pain and peace of mind, but the state, her children, the marriage of Antony—who had long been her lover—to Octavia, the yearning of her own heart, Anubis, magic, and the Egyptian teachings of the life after death, above all, the burning ambition, the unresting desire to be loved, where she herself loved, to be first among the foremost—"

Here he was interrupted by the messenger, who informed him that the ship was ready.

CHAPTER VII.

Archibius had buried himself so deeply in the past that it was several minutes ere he could bring himself back to the present. When he did so, he hastily discussed with the two ladies the date of their

departure.

It was hard for Berenike to leave her injured brother, and Barine longed to see Dion once more before the journey. Both were reluctant to quit Alexandria ere decisive news had arrived from the army and the fleet. So they requested a few days' delay; but Archibius cut them short, requiring them, with a resolution which transformed the amiable friend into a stern master, to be ready for the journey the next day at sunset. His Nile boat would await them at the Agathodaemon harbour on Lake Mareotis, and his travelling chariot would convey them thither, with as much luggage and as many female slaves as they desired to take with them. Then softening his tone, he briefly reminded the ladies of the great annoyances to which a longer stay would expose them, excused his rigour on the plea of haste, pressed the hands of the mother and daughter, and retired without heeding Barine, who called after him, yet could desire nothing save to plead for a longer delay. The carriage bore him swiftly to the great harbour.

The waxing moon was mirrored like a silver column, now wavering and tremulous, now rent by the waves tossing under a strong southeast wind, and illumined the warm autumn night. The sea outside was evidently running high. This was apparent by the motion of the vessels lying at anchor in the angle which the shore in front of the superb Temple of Poseidon formed with the Choma. This was a tongue of land stretched like a finger into the sea, on whose point stood a little palace which Cleopatra, incited by a chance remark of Antony, had had built there to surprise him.

Another, of white marble, glimmered in the moonlight from the island of Antirrhodus; and farther still a blazing fire illumined the darkness. Its flames flared from the top of the famous lighthouse on the island of Pharos at the entrance of the harbour, and, swayed to and fro by the wind, steeped the horizon and the outer edge of the dark water in the harbour with moving masses of light which irradiated the gloomy distance, sometimes faintly, anon more brilliantly.

Spite of the late hour, the harbour was full of bustle, though the wind often blew the men's cloaks over their heads, and the women were obliged to gather their garments closely around them. True, at this hour commerce had ceased; but many had gone to the port in search of news, or even to greet before others the first ship returning from the victorious fleet; for that Antony had defeated Octavianus in a great battle was deemed certain.

Guards were watching the harbour, and a band of Syrian horsemen had just passed from the barracks in the southern part of the Lochias to the Temple of Poseidon.

Here the galleys lay at anchor, not in the harbour of Eunostus, which was separated from the other by the broad, bridge-like dam of the Heptastadium, that united the city and the island of Pharos. Near it were the royal palaces and the arsenal, and any tidings must first reach this spot. The other harbour was devoted to commerce, but, in order to prevent the spread of false reports, newly arrived ships were forbidden to enter.

True, even at the great harbour, news could scarcely be expected, for a chain stretching from the end of the Pharos to a cliff directly opposite in the Alveus Steganus, closed the narrow opening. But it could be raised if a state galley arrived with an important message, and this was expected by the throng on the shore.

Doubtless many came from banquets, cookshops, taverns, or the nocturnal meeting-places of the sects that practised the magic arts, yet the weight of anxious expectation seemed to check the joyous activity, and wherever Archibius glanced he beheld eager, troubled faces. The wind forced many to bow their heads, and, wherever they turned their eyes, flags and clouds of dust were fluttering in the air, increasing the confusion.

As the galley put off from the shore, and the flutes summoned the oarsmen to their toil, its owner felt so disheartened that he did not even venture to hope that he was going in quest of good tidings.

Long-vanished days had, as it were, been called from the grave, and many a scene from the past rose before him as he lay among the cushions on the poop, gazing at the sky, across which dark, swiftly sailing clouds sometimes veiled the stars and again revealed them.

"How much we can conceal by words without being guilty of falsehood!" he murmured, while recalling what he had told the women.

Ay, he had been Cleopatra's confidant in his early youth, but how he had loved her, how, even as a boy, he had been subject to her, body and soul! He had allowed her to see it, displayed, confessed it; and she had accepted it as her rightful due. She had repelled with angry pride his only attempt to clasp her, in his overflowing affection, in his arms; but to show his love for her is a crime for which the loftiest woman pardons the humblest suitor, and a few hours later Cleopatra had met him with the old

affectionate familiarity.

Again he recalled the torments which he had endured when compelled to witness how completely she yielded to the passion which drew her to Antony. At that time the Roman had merely swept through her life like a swiftly passing meteor, but many things betrayed that she did not forget him; and while Archibius had seen without pain her love for the great Caesar bud and grow, the torturing feeling of jealousy again stirred in his heart, though youth was past, when at Tarsus, on the river Cydnus, she renewed the bond which still united her to Antony.

Now his hair had grown grey, and though nothing had clouded his friendship for the Queen, though he had always been ready to serve her, this foolish feeling had not been banished, and again and again mastered his whole being. He by no means undervalued Antony's attractions; but he saw his foibles no less clearly. All in all, whenever he thought of this pair, he felt like the lover of art who entrusts the finest gem in his collection to a rich man who knows not how to prize its real value, and puts it in the wrong place.

Yet he wished the Roman the most brilliant victory; for his defeat would have been Cleopatra's also, and would she endure the consequences of such a disaster?

The galley was approaching the flickering circle of light at the foot of the Pharos, and Archibius was just producing the token which was to secure the lifting of the chain, when his name echoed through the stillness of the night.

It was Dion hailing him from a boat tossing near the mouth of the harbour on the waves surging in from the turbulent sea. He had recognized Archibius's swift galley from the bust of Epicurus which was illumined by the light of the lantern in the prow. Cleopatra had had it placed upon the ship which, by her orders, had been built for her friend.

Dion now desired to join him, and was soon standing on the deck at his side. He had landed on the island of Pharos, and entered a sailors' tavern to learn what was passing. But no one could give him any definite information, for the wind was blowing from the land and allowed large vessels to approach the Egyptian coast only by the aid of oars. Shortly before the breeze had veered from south to southeast, and an experienced Rhodian would "never again lift cup of wine to his lips" if it did not blow from the north to-morrow or the day after. Then ships bearing news might reach Alexandria by the dozen—that is, the greybeard added with a defiant glance at the daintily clad city gentleman—if they were allowed to pass the Pharos or go through the Poseidon basin into the Eunostus. He had fancied that he saw sails on the horizon at sunset, but the swiftest galley became a hedgehog when the wind blew against its prow, and even checked the oars.

Others, too, had fancied that they had seen sails, and Dion would gladly have gone out to sea to investigate, but he was entirely alone in a frail hired boat, and this would not have been permitted to pass beyond the harbour. The expectation that every road would be open to Archibius had not deceived him, and the harbour chain was drawn aside for the Epicurus. With swelling sails, urged by the strong wind blowing from the southeast, its keel cut the rolling waves.

Soon a faint, tremulous light appeared in the north. It must be a ship; and though the helmsman in the tavern at Pharos, who looked as though he had not always steered peaceful trading-vessels, had spoken of some which did not let the ships they caught pass unscathed, the men on the well-equipped, stately Epicurus did not fear pirates, especially as morning was close at hand, and it had just shot by two clumsy men-of-war which had been sent out by the Regent.

The strong wind filled every sail, rowing would have been useless labour, and the light in front seemed to be coming nearer.

A wan glimmer was already beginning to brighten the distant east when the Epicurus approached the vessel with the light, but it seemed to wish to avoid the Alexandrian, and turned suddenly towards the northeast.

Archibius and Dion now discussed whether it would be worth while to pursue the fugitive. It was a small ship, which, as the dark masses of clouds became bordered with golden edges, grew more distinct and appeared to be a Cilician pirate of the smallest size.

As to its crew, the tried sailors on the Epicurus, a much larger vessel, which lacked no means of defence, showed no signs of alarm, the helmsman especially, who had served in the fleet of Sextus Pompey, and had sprung upon the deck of many a pirate ship.

Archibius deemed it foolish to commence a conflict unnecessarily. But Dion was in the mood to brave every peril.

If life and death were at stake, so much the better!

He had informed his friend of Iras's fears.

The fleet must be in a critical situation, and if the little Cilician had had nothing to conceal she would not have shunned the Epicurus.

It was worth while to learn what had induced her to turn back just before reaching the harbour. The warlike helmsman also desired to give chase, and Archibius yielded, for the uncertainty was becoming more and more unbearable. Dion's soul was deeply burdened too. He could not banish Barine's image; and since Archibius had told him that he had found her resolved to shut her house against guests, and how willingly she had accepted his invitation to the country, again and again he pondered over the question what should prevent his marrying the quiet daughter of a distinguished artist, whom he loved?

Archibius had remarked that Barine would be glad to greet her most intimate friends—among whom he was included—in her quiet country.

Dion did not doubt this, but he was equally sure that the greeting would bind him to her and rub him of his liberty, perhaps forever. But would the Alexandrian possess the lofty gift of freedom, if the Romans ruled his city as they governed Carthage or Corinth? If Cleopatra were defeated, and Egypt became a Roman province, a share in the business of the council, which was still addressed as "Macedonian men," and which was dear to Dion, could offer nothing but humiliation, and no longer afford satisfaction.

If a pirate's spear put an end to bondage under the Roman yoke and to this unworthy yearning and wavering, so much the better!

On this autumn morning, under this grey sky, from which sank a damp, light fog, with these hopes and fears in his heart, he beheld in both the present and future naught save shadows.

The Epicurus overtook and captured the fugitive. The slight resistance the vessel might have offered was relinquished when Archibius's helmsman shouted that the Epicurus did not belong to the royal navy, and had come in search of news.

The Cilician took in his oars; Archibius and Dion entered the vessel and questioned the commander.

He was an old, weather-beaten seaman, who would give no information until after he had learned what his pursuers really desired.

At first he protested that he had witnessed on the Peloponnesian coast a great victory gained by the Egyptian galleys over those commanded by Octavianus; but the queries of the two friends involved him in contradictions, and he then pretended to know nothing, and to have spoken of a victory merely to please the Alexandrian gentlemen.

Dion, accompanied by a few men from the crew of the Epicurus, searched the ship, and found in the little cabin a man bound and gagged, guarded by one of the pirates.

It was a sailor from the Pontus, who spoke only his native language. Nothing intelligible could be obtained from him; but there were important suggestions in a letter, found in a chest in the cabin, among clothing, jewels, and other stolen articles.

The letter-Dion could scarcely believe his own eyes-was addressed to his friend, the architect Gorgias. The pirate, being ignorant of writing, had not opened it, but Dion tore the wax from the cord without delay. Aristocrates, the Greek rhetorician, who had accompanied Antony to the war, had written from Taenarum, in the south of the Peloponnesus, requesting the architect, in the general's name, to set the little palace at the end of the Choma in order, and surround it on the land side with a high wall.

No door would be necessary. Communication with the dwelling could be had by water. He must do his utmost to complete the work speedily.

The friends gazed at each other in astonishment, as they read this commission.

What could induce Antony to give so strange an order? How did it fall into the hands of the pirates?

This must be understood.

When Archibius, whose gentle nature, so well adapted to inspire confidence, quickly won friends, burst into passionate excitement, the unexpected transition rarely failed to produce its effect, especially as his tall, strong figure and marked features made a still more threatening impression.

Even the captain gazed at him with fear, when the Alexandrian threatened to recall all his promises of consideration and mercy if the pirate withheld even the smallest trifle connected with this letter. The man speedily perceived that it would be useless to make false statements; for the captive from Pontus, though unable to speak Greek, understood the language, and either confirmed every remark of the other with vehement gestures, or branded it in the same manner as false.

Thus it was discovered that the pirate craft, in company with a much larger vessel, owned by a companion, had lurked behind the promontory of Crete for a prize. They had neither seen nor heard aught concerning the two fleets, when a dainty galley, "the finest and fleetest that ever sailed in the sea"—it was probably the "Swallow," Antony's despatch-boat—had run into the snare. To capture her was an easy task. The pirates had divided their booty, but the lion's share of goods and men had fallen to the larger ship.

A pouch containing letters and money had been taken from a gentleman of aristocratic appearance—probably Antony's messenger—who had received a severe wound, died, and had been flung into the sea. The former had been used to light the fire, and only the one addressed to the architect remained.

The captured sailors had said that the fleet of Octavianus had defeated Cleopatra's, and the Queen had fled, but that the land forces were still untouched, and might yet decide the conflict in Antony's favour. The pirate protested that he did not know the position of the army—it might be at Taenarum, whence the captured ship came. It was a sin and a shame, but his own crew had set it on fire, and it sank before his eyes.

This report seemed to be true, yet the Acharnanian coast, where the battle was said to have been fought, was so far from the southern point of the Peloponnesus, whence Antony's letter came, that it must have been written during the flight. One thing appeared to be certain—the fleet had been vanquished and dispersed on the 2d or 3d of September.

Where would the Queen go now? What had become of the magnificent galleys which had accompanied her to the battle?

Even the contrary winds would not have detained them so long, for they were abundantly supplied with rowers.

Had Octavianus taken possession of them? Were they burned or sunk?

But in that case how had Antony reached Taenarum?

The pirate could give no answer to these questions, which stirred both heart and brain. Why should he conceal what had reached his ears?

At last Archibius ordered the property stolen from Antony's ship, and the liberated sailor to be brought on board the Epicurus, but the pirate was obliged to swear not to remain in the waters between Crete and Alexandria. Then he was suffered to pursue his way unmolested.

This adventure had occupied many hours, and the return against the wind was slow; for, during the chase the Epicurus had been carried by the strong breeze far out to sea. Yet, when still several miles from the mouth of the harbour at the Pharos, it was evident that the Rhodian helmsman in the island tavern had predicted truly; for the weather changed with unusual speed, and the wind now blew from the north. The sea fairly swarmed with ships, some belonging to the royal fleet, some to curious Alexandrians, who had sailed out to take a survey. Archibius and Dion had spent a sleepless night and day. The heavy air, pervaded by a fine mist, had grown cool. After refreshing themselves by a repast, they paced up and down the deck of the Epicurus.

Few words were exchanged, and they wrapped their cloaks closer around them. Both had quaffed large draughts of the fiery wine with which the Epicurus was well supplied, but it would not warm them. Even the fire, blazing brightly in the richly furnished cabin, could scarcely do so.

Archibius's thoughts lingered with his beloved Queen, and his vivid power of imagination conjured before his mind everything which could distress her. No possible chance, not even the most terrible, was forgotten, and when he saw her sinking in the ship, stretching her beautiful arms imploringly towards him, to whom she had so long turned in every perilous position, when he beheld her a captive in the presence of the hostile, cold-hearted Octavianus, the blood seemed to freeze in his veins. At last he dropped his felt mantle and, groaning aloud, struck his brow with his clenched hand. He had fancied her walking with gold chains on her slender wrists before the victor's four-horse chariot, and heard the exulting shouts of the Roman populace.

That would have been the most terrible of all. To pursue this train of thought was beyond the endurance of the faithful friend, and Dion turned in surprise as he heard him sob and saw the tears which bedewed his face.

His own heart was heavy enough, but he knew his companion's warm devotion to the Queen; so, passing his arm around his shoulder, he entreated him to maintain that peace of soul and mind which he had so often admired. In the most critical situations he had seen him stand high above them, as yonder man who fed the flames on the summit of the Pharos stood above the wild surges of the sea. If he would reflect over what had happened as dispassionately as usual, he could not fail to see that Antony must be free and in a position to guide his own future, since he directed the palace in the Choma to be put in order. He did not understand about the wall, but perhaps he was bringing home some distinguished captive whom he wished to debar from all communication with the city. It might prove that everything was far better than they feared, and they would yet smile at these grievous anxieties. His heart, too, was heavy, for he wished the Queen the best fortune, not only for her own sake, but because with her and her successful resistance to the greed of Rome was connected the liberty of Alexandria.

"My love and anxiety, like yours," he concluded, "have ever been given to her, the sovereign of this country. The world will be desolate, life will no longer be worth living, if the iron foot of Rome crushes our independence and freedom." The words had sounded cordial and sincere, and Archibius followed Dion's counsel. Calm thought convinced him that nothing had yet happened which compelled belief in the worst result; and, as one who needs consolation often finds relief in comforting another, Archibius cheered his own heart by representing to his younger friend that, even if Octavianus were the victor and should deprive Egypt of her independence, he would scarcely venture to take from the citizens of Alexandria the free control of their own affairs. Then he explained to Dion that, as a young, resolute, independent man, he might render himself doubly useful if it were necessary to guard the endangered liberty of the city, and told him how many beautiful things life still held in store.

His voice expressed anxious tenderness for his young friend. No one had spoken thus to Dion since his father's death.

The Epicurus would soon reach the mouth of the harbour, and after landing he must again leave Archibius.

The decisive hour which often unites earnest men more firmly than many previous years had come to both. They had opened their hearts to each other. Dion had withheld only the one thing which, at the first sight of the houses in the city, filled his soul with fresh uneasiness.

It was long since he had sought counsel from others. Many who had asked his, had left him with thanks, to do exactly the opposite of what he had advised, though it would have been to their advantage. More than once he, too, had done the same, but now a powerful impulse urged him to confide in Archibius. He knew Barine, and wished her the greatest happiness. Perhaps it would be wise to let another person, who was kindly disposed, consider what his own heart so eagerly demanded and prudence forbade.

Hastily forming his resolution, he again turned to his friend, saying:

"You have shown yourself a father to me. Imagine that I am indeed your son, and, as such wished to confess that a woman had become dear to my heart, and to ask whether you would be glad to greet her as a daughter."

Here Archibius interrupted him with the exclamation: "A ray of light amid all this gloom? Grasp what you have too long neglected as soon as possible! It befits a good citizen to marry. The Greek does not attain full manhood till he becomes husband and father. If I have remained unwedded, there was a special reason for it, and how often I have envied the cobbler whom I saw standing before his shop in the evening, holding his child in his arms, or the pilot, to whom large and small hands were stretched in greeting when he returned home! When I enter my dwelling only my dogs rejoice. But you, whose beautiful palace stands empty, to whose proud family it is due that you should provide for its continuance—"

"That is just what brings me into a state of indecision, which is usually foreign to my nature," interrupted Dion. "You know me and my position in the world, and you have also known from her earliest childhood the woman to whom I allude."

"Iras?" asked his companion, hesitatingly. His sister, Charmian, had told him of the love felt by the Queen's younger waiting-woman.

But Dion eagerly denied this, adding I am speaking of Barine, the daughter of your dead friend

Leonax. I love her, yet my pride is sensitive, and I know that it will extend to my future wife. The contemptuous glances which others might cast at her I should scorn, for I know her worth. Surely you remember my mother: she was a very different woman. Her house, her child, the slaves, her loom, were everything to her. She rigidly exacted from other women the chaste reserve which was a marked trait in her own character. Yet she was gentle, and loved me, her only son, beyond aught else. I think she would have opened her arms to Barine, had she believed that she was necessary to my happiness. But would the young beauty, accustomed to gay intercourse with distinguished men, have been able to submit to her demands? When I consider that she cannot help taking into her married life the habit of being surrounded and courted; when I think that the imprudence of a woman accustomed to perfect freedom might set idle tongues in motion, and cast a shadow upon the radiant purity of my name; when I even—" and he raised his clenched right hand. But Archibius answered soothingly:

"That anxiety is groundless if Barine warmly and joyfully gives you her whole heart. It is a sunny, lovable, true woman's heart, and therefore capable of a great love. If she bestows it on you—and I believe she will—go and offer sacrifices in your gratitude; for the immortals desired your happiness when they guided your choice to her and not to Iras, my own sister's child. If you were really my son, I would now exclaim, 'You could not bring me a dearer daughter, if—I repeat it— if you are sure of her love.'"

Dion gazed into vacancy a short time, and then cried firmly: "I am!"

CHAPTER VIII.

The Epicurus anchored before the Temple of Poseidon. The crew had been ordered to keep silence, though they knew nothing, except that a letter from Antony, commanding the erection of a wall, had been found on board the pirate. This might be regarded as a good omen, for people do not think of building unless they anticipate a time of peace.

The light rain had ceased, but the wind blew more strongly from the north, and the air had grown cool. A dense throng still covered the quay from the southern end of the Heptastadium to the promontory of Lochias. The strongest pressure was between the peninsula of the Choma and the Sebasteum; for this afforded a view of the sea, and the first tidings must reach the residence of the Regent, which was connected with the palace.

A hundred contradictory rumours had been in circulation that morning; and when, at the third hour in the afternoon, the Epicurus arrived, it was surrounded by a dense multitude eager to hear what news the ship had brought from without.

Other vessels shared the same fate, but none could give reliable tidings.

Two swift galleys from the royal fleet reported meeting a Samian trireme, which had given news of a great victory gained by Antony on the land and Cleopatra on the sea, and, as men are most ready to believe what they desire, throngs of exulting men and women moved to and fro along the shore, strengthening by their confidence many a timorous spirit. Prudent people, who had regarded the long delay of the first ships of the fleet with anxiety, had opened their ears to the tales of evil, and looked forward to the future with uneasiness. But they avoided giving expression to their fears, for the overseer of an establishment for gold embroidery, who had ventured to warn the people against premature rejoicing, had limped home badly beaten, and two other pessimists who had been flung in the sea had just been dragged out dripping wet.

Nor could the multitude be blamed for this confidence; for at the Serapeum, the theatre of Dionysus, the lofty pylons of the Sebasteum, the main door of the museum, in front of the entrance of the palace in the Bruchium, and before the fortress-like palaces in the Lochias, triumphal arches had been erected, adorned with gods of victory and trophies hastily constructed of plaster, inscriptions of congratulations and thanks to the deities, garlands of foliage and flowers. The wreathing of the Egyptian pylons and obelisks, the principal temple, and the favourite statues in the city had been commenced during the night. The last touches were now being given to the work.

Gorgias, like his friend Dion, had not closed his eyes since the night before; for he had had charge of all the decorations of the Bruchium, where one superb building adjoined another.

Sleep had also fled from the couches of the occupants of the Sebasteum, the royal palace where Iras

lived during the absence of the Queen, and the practorium, facing its southern front, which contained the official residence of the Regent.

When Archibius was conducted to the Queen's waiting-woman, her appearance fairly startled him. She had been his guest in Kanopus only the day before yesterday, and how great was the alteration within this brief time! Her oval face seemed to have lengthened, the features to have grown sharper; and this woman of seven-and-twenty years, who had hitherto retained all the charms of youth, appeared suddenly to have aged a decade. There was a feverish excitement in her manner, as, holding out her hand to her uncle, in greeting, she exclaimed hastily, "You, too, bring no good tidings?"

"Nor any evil ones," he answered quietly. "But, child, I do not like your appearance—the dark circles under your keen eyes. You have had news which rouses your anxiety?"

"Worse than that," she answered in a low tone.

"Well?"

"Read!" gasped Iras, her lips and nostrils quivering as she handed Archibius a small tablet. With a gesture of haste very unusual in him, he snatched it from her hand and, as his eyes ran over the words traced upon it, every vestige of colour vanished from his cheeks and lips.

They were written by Cleopatra's own hand, and contained the following lines:

"The naval battle was lost—and by my fault. The land forces might still save us, but not under his command. He is with me, uninjured, but apparently exhausted; like a different being, bereft of courage, listless as if utterly crushed. I foresee the beginning of the end. As soon as this reaches you, arrange to have some unpretending litters ready for us every evening at sunset. Make the people believe that we have conquered until trustworthy intelligence arrives concerning the fate of Canidius and the army. When you kiss the children in my name, be very tender with them. Who knows how soon they may be orphaned? They already have an unhappy mother; may they be spared the memory of a cowardly one! Trust no one except those whom I left in authority, and Archibius, not even Caesarion or Antyllus. Provide for having every one whose aid may be valuable to me within reach when I come. I cannot close with the familiar 'Rejoice'—the 'Fresh Courage' placed on many a tombstone seems more appropriate. You who did not envy me in my happiness will help me to bear misfortune. Epicurus, who believes that the gods merely watch the destiny of men inactively from their blissful heights, is right. Were it otherwise, how could the love and loyalty which cleave to the hapless, defeated woman, be repaid with anguish of heart and tears? Yet continue to love her."

Archibius, pale and silent, let the tablet fall. It was long ere he gasped hoarsely: "I foresaw it; yet now that it is here—" His voice failed, and violent, tearless sobs shook his powerful frame.

Sinking on a couch he buried his face amid the cushions.

Iras gazed at the strong man and shook her head. She, too, loved the Queen; the news had brought tears to her eyes also; but even while she wept, a host of plans coping with this disaster had darted through her restless brain. A few minutes after the arrival of the message of misfortune she had consulted with the members of Cleopatra's council, and adopted measures for sustaining the people's belief in the naval victory.

What was she, the delicate, by no means courageous girl, compared to this man of iron strength who, she was well aware, had braved the greatest perils in the service of the Queen? Yet there he lay with his face hidden in the pillows as if utterly overwhelmed.

Did a woman's soul rebound more quickly after being crushed beneath the burdens of the heaviest suffering, or was hers of a special character, and her slender body the casket of a hero's nature?

She had reason to believe so when she recalled how the Regent and the Keeper of the Seal had received the terrible news. They had rushed frantically up and down the vast hall as if desperate; but Mardion the eunuch had little manhood, and Zeno was a characterless old author who had won the Queen's esteem, and the high office which he occupied solely by the vivid power of imagination, that enabled him constantly to devise new exhibitions, amusements, and entertainments, and present them with magical splendour.

But Archibius, the brave, circumspect counsellor and helper?

His shoulders again quivered as if they had received a blow, and Iras suddenly remembered what she had long known, but never fully realized—that yonder grey-haired man loved Cleopatra, loved her as she herself loved Dion; and she wondered whether she would have been strong enough to maintain her

composure if she had learned that a cruel fate threatened to rob him of life, liberty, and honour.

Hour after hour she had vainly awaited the young Alexandrian, yet he had witnessed her anxiety the day before. Had she offended him? Was he detained by the spell of Didymus's granddaughter?

It seemed a great wrong that, amid the unspeakably terrible misfortune which had overtaken her mistress, she could not refrain from thinking continually of Dion. Even as his image filled her heart, Cleopatra's ruled her uncle's mind and soul, and she said to herself that it was not alone among women that love paid no heed to years, or whether the locks were brown or tinged with grey.

But Archibius now raised himself, left the couch, passed his hand across his brow, and in the deep, calm tones natural to his voice, began with a sorrowful smile: "A man stricken by an arrow leaves the fray to have his wound bandaged. The surgeon has now finished his task. I ought to have spared you this pitiable spectacle, child. But I am again ready for the battle. Cleopatra's account of Antony's condition renders a piece of news which we have just received somewhat more intelligible."

"We?" replied Iras. "Who was your companion?"

"Dion," answered Archibius; but when he was about to describe the incidents of the preceding night, she interrupted him with the question whether Barine had consented to leave the city. He assented with a curt "Yes," but Iras assumed the manner of having expected nothing different, and requested him to continue his story.

Archibius now related everything which they had experienced, and their discovery in the pirate ship. Dion was even now on the way to carry Antony's order to his friend Gorgias.

"Any slave might have attended to that matter equally well," Iras remarked in an irritated tone. "I should think he would have more reason to expect trustworthy tidings here. But that's the way with men!"

Here she hesitated but, meeting an inquiring glance from her uncle, she went on eagerly; "Nothing, I believe, binds them more firmly to one another than mutual pleasure. But that must now be over. They will seek other amusements, whether with Heliodora or Thais I care not. If the woman had only gone before! When she caught young Caesarion—"

"Stay, child," her uncle interrupted reprovingly. "I know how much she would rejoice if Antyllus had never brought the boy to her house."

"Now—because the poor deluded lad's infatuation alarms her."

"No, from his first visit. Immature boys do not suit the distinguished men whom she receives."

"If the door is always kept open, thieves will enter the house."

"She received only old acquaintances, and the friends whom they presented. Her house was closed to all others. So there was no trouble with thieves. But who in Alexandria could venture to refuse admittance to a son of the Queen?"

"There is a wide difference between quiet admittance and fanning a passion to madness. Wherever a fire is burning, there has certainly been a spark to kindle it. You men do not detect such women's work. A glance, a pressure of the hand, even the light touch of a garment, and the flame blazes, where such inflammable material lies ready."

"We lament the violence of the conflagration. You are not well disposed towards Barine."

"I care no more for her than this couch here cares for the statue of Mercury in the street!" exclaimed Iras, with repellent arrogance. "There could be no two things in the world more utterly alien than we. Between the woman whose door stands open, and me, there is nothing in common save our sex."

"And," replied Archibius reprovingly, "many a beautiful gift which the gods bestowed upon her as well as upon you. As for the open door, it was closed yesterday. The thieves of whom you spoke spoiled her pleasure in granting hospitality. Antyllus forced himself with noisy impetuosity into her house. This made her dread still more unprecedented conduct in the future. In a few hours she will be on the way to Irenia. I am glad for Caesarion's sake, and still more for his mother's, whom we have wronged by forgetting so long for another."

"To think that we should be forced to do so!" cried Iras excitedly—"now, at this hour, when every drop of blood, every thought of this poor brain should belong to the Queen! Yet it could not be avoided. Cleopatra is returning to us with a heart bleeding from a hundred wounds, and it is terrible to think

that a new arrow must strike her as soon as she steps upon her native soil. You know how she loves the boy, who is the living image of the great man with whom she shared the highest joys of love. When she learns that he, the son of Caesar, has given his young heart to the cast-off wife of a street orator, a woman whose home attracted men as ripe dates lure birds, it will be—I know—like rubbing salt into her fresh wounds. Alas! and the one sorrow will not be all. Antony, her husband, also found the way to Barine. He sought her more than once. You cannot know it as I do; but Charmian will tell you how sensitive she has become since the flower of her youthful charms—you don't perceive it—is losing one leaf after another. Jealousy will torture her, and—I know her well—perhaps no one will ever render the siren a greater service than I did when I compelled her to leave the city."

The eyes of Archibius's clever niece had glittered with such hostile feeling as she spoke that he thought with just anxiety of his dead friend's daughter. What did not yet threaten Barine as serious danger Iras had the power to transform into grave peril.

Dion had begged him to maintain strict secrecy; but even had he been permitted to speak, he would not have done so now. From his knowledge of Iras's character she might be expected, if she learned that some one had come between her and the friend of her youth, to shrink from no means of spoiling her game. He remembered the noble Macedonian maiden whom the Queen had begun to favour, and who was hunted to death by Iras's hostile intrigues. Few were more clever, and—if she once loved—more loyal and devoted, more yielding, pliant, and in happy hours more bewitching, yet even in childhood she had preferred a winding path to a straight one. It seemed as if her shrewdness scorned to attain the end desired by the simple method lying close at hand. How willingly his mother and his younger sister Charmian had cared for the slaves and nursed them when they were ill; nay, Charmian had gained in her Nubian maid Aniukis a friend who would have gone to death for her sake! Cleopatra, too, when a child, had found sincere delight in taking a bouquet to his parents' sick old housekeeper and sitting by her bedside to shorten the time for her with merry talk. She had gone to her unasked, while Iras had often been punished because she had made the lives of numerous slaves in her parents' household still harder by unreasonable harshness. This trait in her character had roused her uncle's anxiety and, in after-years, her treatment of her inferiors had been such that he could not number her among the excellent of her sex. Therefore he was the more joyfully surprised by the loyal, unselfish love with which she devoted herself to the service of the Queen. Cleopatra had gratified Charmian's wish to have her niece for an assistant; and Iras, who had never been a loving daughter to her own faithful mother, had served her royal mistress with the utmost tenderness.

Archibius valued this loyalty highly, but he knew what awaited any one who became the object of her hatred, and the fear that it would involve Barine in urgent peril was added to his still greater anxiety for Cleopatra.

When about to depart, burdened by the sorrowful conviction that he was powerless against his niece's malevolent purpose, he was detained by the representation that every fresh piece of intelligence would first reach the Sebasteum and her. Some question might easily arise which his calm, prudent mind could decide far better than hers, whose troubled condition resembled a shallow pool disturbed by stones flung into the waves.

The apartments of his sister Charmian, which were connected with his by a corridor, were empty, and Iras begged him to remain there a short time. The anxiety and dread that oppressed her heart would kill her. To know that he was near would be the greatest comfort.

When Archibius hesitated because he deemed it his duty to urge Caesarion, over whom he possessed some influence, to give up his foolish wishes for his mother's sake, Iras assured him that he would not find the youth. He had gone hunting with Antyllus and some other friends. She had approved the plan, because it removed him from the city and Barine's dangerous house.

"As the Queen does not wish him to know the terrible news yet," she concluded, "his presence would only have caused us embarrassment. So stay, and when it grows dark go with us to the Lochias. I think it will please the sorrowing woman, when she lands, to see your familiar face, which will remind her of happier days. Do me the favour to stay." She held out both hands beseechingly as she spoke, and Archibius consented.

A repast was served, and he shared it with his niece; but Iras did not touch the carefully chosen viands, and Archibius barely tasted them. Then, without waiting for dessert, he rose to go to his sister's apartments. But Iras urged him to rest on the divan in the adjoining room, and he yielded. Yet, spite of the softness of the pillows and his great need of sleep, he could not find it; anxiety kept him awake, and through the curtain which divided the room in which Iras remained from the one he occupied he sometimes heard her light footsteps pacing restlessly to and fro, sometimes the coming and going of messengers in quest of news.

All his former life passed before his mind. Cleopatra had been his sun, and now black clouds were rising which would dim its light, perchance forever. He, the disciple of Epicurus, who had not followed the doctrines of other masters until later in life, held the same view of the gods as his first master. To him also they had seemed immortal beings sufficient unto themselves, dwelling free from anxiety in blissful peace, to whom mortals must look upward on account of their supreme grandeur, but who neither troubled themselves about the guidance of the world, which was fixed by eternal laws, nor the fate of individuals. Had he been convinced of the contrary, he would have sacrificed everything he possessed in order, by lavish offerings, to propitiate the immortals in behalf of her to whom he had devoted his life and every faculty of his being.

Like Iras, he, too, could find no rest upon his couch, and when she heard his step she called to him and asked why he did not recover the sleep which he had lost. No one knew the demands the next night might make upon him.

"You will find me awake," he answered quietly.

Then he went to the window which, above the pylons that rose before the main front of the Sebasteum, afforded a view of the Bruchium and the sea. The harbour was now swarming with vessels of every size, garlanded with flowers and adorned with gay flags and streamers. The report of the successful issue of the first naval battle was believed, and many desired to greet the victorious fleet and hail their sovereign as she entered the harbour.

Many people, equipages, and litters had also gathered on the shore, between the lofty pylons and the huge door of the Sebasteum. They were representatives of the aristocracy of the city; for the majority were attended by richly attired slaves. Many wore costly garlands, and numerous chariots and litters were adorned with gold or silver ornaments, gems, and glittering paste. The stir and movement in front of the palace were ceaseless, and Iras, who was now standing beside her uncle, waved her hand towards it, saying: "The wind of rumour! Yesterday only one or two came; to-day every one who belongs to the 'Inimitable Livers' flocks hither in person to get news. The victory was proclaimed in the market-place, at the theatre, the gymnasium, and the camp. Every one who wears garlands or weapons heard of a battle won. Yesterday, among all the thousands, there was scarcely a single doubter; but to-day—how does it happen? Even among those who as 'Inimitables' have shared all the pleasures, entertainments, and festivities of our noble pair, faith wavers; for if they were firmly convinced of the brilliant victory which was announced loudly enough, they would not come themselves to watch, to spy, to listen. Just look down! There is the litter of Diogenes— yonder that of Ammonius. The chariot beyond belongs to Melampous. The slaves in the red bombyx garments serve Hermias. They all belong to the society of—'Inimitables,' and shared our banquets. That very Apollonius who, for the last half hour, has been trying to question the palace servants, day before yesterday ordered fifty oxen to be slaughtered to Ares, Nike, and the great Isis, as the Queen's goddess, and when I met him in the temple he exclaimed that this was the greatest piece of extravagance he had ever committed; for even without the cattle Cleopatra and Antony would be sure of victory. But now the wind of rumour has swept away his beautiful confidence also. They are not permitted to see me. The doorkeepers say that I am in the country. The necessity of showing every one a face radiant with the joy of victory would kill me. There comes Apollonius. How his fat face beams! He believes in the victory, and after sunset none of yonder throng will appear here; he is already giving orders to his slaves. He will invite all his friends to a banquet, and won't spare his costly wines. Capital! At least no one from that company can disturb us. Dion is his cousin, and will be present also. We shall see what these pleasure-lovers will do when they are forced to confront, the terrible reality."

"I think," replied Archibius, "they will afford the world a remarkable spectacle; friends won in prosperity who remain constant in adversity."

"Do you?" asked Iras, with sparkling eyes. "If that proves true, how I would praise and value men—the majority of whom without their wealth would be poorer than beggars. But look at yonder figure in the white robe beside the left obelisk—is it not Dion? The crowd is bearing him away—I think it was he."

But she had been deceived; the man whom she fancied she had seen, because her heart so ardently yearned for him, was not near the Sebasteum, and his thoughts were still farther away.

At first he had intended to give the architect the letter which was addressed to him. He would be sure to find him at the triumphal arch which was being erected on the shore of the Bruchium. But on reaching the former place he learned that Gorgias had gone to remove the statues of Cleopatra and Antony from the house of Didymus, and erect them in front of the Theatre of Dionysus. The Regent, Mardion, had ordered it. Gorgias was already superintending the erection of the foundation.

The huge hewn stones which he required for this purpose had been taken from the Temple of Nemesis, which he was supervising. Whatever number of government slaves he needed were at his disposal, so Gorgias's foreman reported, proudly adding that before the sun went down, the architect would have shown the Alexandrians the marvel of removing the twin statues from one place to another in a single day, and yet establishing them as firmly as the Colossus which had been in Thebes a thousand years.

Dion found the piece of sculpture in front of Didymus's garden, ready for removal, but the slaves who had placed before the platform the rollers on which it was to be moved had already been kept waiting a long time by the architect.

This was his third visit to the old philosopher's house. First, he had been obliged to inform him and his family that their property was no longer in danger; then he had come to tell them at what hour he would remove the statues, which still attracted many curious spectators; and, finally, he had again appeared, to announce that they were to be taken away at once. His foreman or a slave could probably have done this, but Helena—Didymus's granddaughter, Barine's sister—drew him again and again to the old man's home. He would gladly have come still more frequently, for at every meeting he had discovered fresh charms in the beautiful, quiet, thoughtful maiden, who cared so tenderly for her aged grandparents. He believed that he loved her, and she seemed glad to welcome him. But this did not entitle him to seek her hand, though his large, empty house so greatly needed a mistress. His heart had glowed with love for too many. He wished first to test whether this new fancy would prove more lasting. If he succeeded in remaining faithful even a few days, he would, as it were, reward himself for it, and appear before Didymus as a suitor.

He excused his frequent visits to himself on the pretext of the necessity of becoming acquainted with his future wife, and Helena made the task easier for him. The usual reserve of her manner lessened more and more; nay, the great confidence with which he at first inspired her was increased by his active assistance. When he entered just now, she had even held out her hand to him, and inquired about the progress of his work.

He was overwhelmed with business, but so great was his pleasure in talking with her that he lingered longer than he would have deemed right under any other circumstances, and regarded it as an unpleasant interruption when Barine—for whom his heart had throbbed so warmly only yesterday—entered the tablinum.

The young beauty was by no means content with a brief greeting; but drew Helena entirely away from him. Never had he seen her embrace and kiss her sister so passionately as while hurriedly telling her that she had come to bid farewell to the loved ones in her grandparents' house.

Berenike had arrived with her, but went first to the old couple.

While Barine was telling Helena and Gorgias, also, why all this plan had been formed so hastily, Gorgias was silently comparing the two sisters. He found it natural that he had once believed that he loved Barine; but she would not have been a fitting mistress of his house. Life at her side would have been a chain of jealous emotions and anxieties, and her stimulating remarks and searching questions, which demanded absolute attention, would not have permitted him, after his return home, wearied by arduous toil, to find the rest for which he longed. His eye wandered from her to her sister, as if testing the space between two newly erected pillars; and Barine, who had noticed his strange manner, suddenly laughed merrily, and asked whether they might know what building was occupying his thoughts, while a good friend was telling him that the pleasant hours in her house were over.

Gorgias started, and the apology he stammered showed so plainly how inattentively he had listened, that Barine would have had good reason to feel offended. But one glance at her sister and another at him enabled her speedily to guess the truth. She was pleased; for she esteemed Gorgias, and had secretly feared that she might be forced to grieve him by a refusal, but he seemed as if created for her sister. Her arrival had probably interrupted them so, turning to Helena, she exclaimed: "I must see my mother and our grandparents. Meanwhile entertain our friend here. We know each other well. He is one of the few men who can be trusted. That is my honest opinion, Gorgias, and I say it to you also, Helena."

With these words she nodded to both, and Gorgias was again alone with the maiden whom he loved.

It was difficult to begin the conversation anew, and when, spite of many efforts, it would not flow freely, the shout of the overseer, which reached his ear through the opening of the roof, urging the men to work, was like a deliverance. Promising to return again soon, as eagerly as if he had been requested to do so, he took his leave and opened the door leading into the adjoining room. But on the threshold he started back, and Helena, who had followed him, did the same, for there stood his friend Dion, and

Barine's beautiful head lay on his breast, while his hand rested as if in benediction on her fair hair. And—no, Gorgias was not mistaken—the slender frame of the lovely woman, whose exuberant vivacity had so often borne him and others away with it, trembled as if shaken by deep and painful emotion.

When Dion perceived his friend, and Barine raised her head, turning her face towards him, it was indeed wet with tears, but their source could not be sorrow; for her blue eyes were sparkling with a happy light.

Yet Gorgias found something in her features which he was unable to express in words—the reflection of the ardent gratitude that had taken possession of her soul and filled it absolutely. While seeking the architect, Dion had met Barine, who was on her way to her grandparents, and what he had dreaded the day before happened. The first glance from her eyes which met his forced the decisive question from his lips.

In brief, earnest words he confessed his love for her, and his desire to make her his own, as the pride and ornament of his house.

Then, in the intensity of her bliss, her eyes overflowed and, under the spell of a great miracle wrought in her behalf, she found no words to answer; but Dion had approached, clasped her right hand in both of his, and frankly acknowledged how, with the image of his strict mother before his eyes, he had wavered and hesitated until love had overmastered him. Now, full of the warmest confidence, he asked whether she would consent to rule as mistress of his home, the honour and ornament of his ancient name? He knew that her heart was his, but he must hear one thing more from her lips—

Here she had interrupted him with the cry, "This one thing—that your wife, in joy and in sorrow, will live for you and you alone? The whole world can vanish for her, now that you have raised her to your side and she is yours."

After this assurance, which sounded like an oath, Dion felt as if a heavy burden had fallen from his heart, and clasping her in his arms with passionate tenderness, he repeated, "In joy and in sorrow!"

Thus Gorgias and Helena had surprised them, and the architect felt for the first time that there is no distinction between our own happiness and that of those whom we love.

His friend Helena seemed to have the same feeling, when she saw what this day had given her sister; and the philosopher's house, so lately shadowed by anxiety, and many a fear, would soon ring with voices uttering joyous congratulations. The architect no longer felt that he had a place in this circle, which was now pervaded by a great common joy, and after Dion made a brief explanation, Gorgias's voice was soon heard outside loudly issuing orders to the workmen.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

From Epicurus to Aristippus, is but a short step
Preferred a winding path to a straight one

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CLEOPATRA — VOLUME 03 ***

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